Laurel Valley Sugar Plantation: Railroad (Melodia Switch)
2 miles south of Thibodaux on State Route 308
Thibodaux
Lafourche Parish
Louisiana

HAER No. LA-1B

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HAER - LAUREL VALLEY PROJECT
SUMMER 1978

Name: Laurel Valley Railroad (Melodia Switch)

Location: Formerly ran from Laurel Valley Sugar Hous to Bayou Lafourche, with branch linking Laurel Valley to Melodia Plantation. No longer survives.

Date of Construction: 1870's; on-going track additions, 1900-1926

Equipment: locomotives purchased 1877, 1897, 1902; other equipment purchased as needed

Significance: Though no trace remains of this railroad today, it is important to consider it in studying the history of Laurel Valley. The railroad became a vital element of th plantation's operation during the 1900's.

Abstract: The problems of transportation on the pla tations are considered. A brief history of Louisiana plantation railroads is give The development of the Laurel Valley Rail road and its functions are described in detail.

Historian: John C. Rumm

Locomotives no longer cross the fields or rush over trestles above the swamps at Laurel Valley Plantation, but half a century ago it was a common sight "to see a long line of cars loaded with cane come through the swamp in a rush."[1] The Laurel Valley Railroad played such an important role in the day-to-day functioning of the plantation that it must be considered in any industrial study of the estate. This report will examine the railroad system at Laurel Valley, against the larger context of the problem of transportation on a typical Louisiana sugar plantation.

In the first half-century of its existence, the tract of land that would become Laurel Valley Plantation was, like many other estates in the sugar region of Louisiana, a small farm nestled on the banks of a bayou. Bayou Lafourche, the waterway on which this particular plot was situated, attracted many settlers to the area because it provided a navigable link between the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. Land holdings along Bayou Lafourche and along other waterways west of the river were generally small, the Spanish authorities who controlled the land restricting their land grants to depths of no more than forty arpents (one arpent equals 192 feet) from the bayou.[2] The Boudreaux family, first to settle on the lands destined to become Laurel Valley, lived a simple existence like their Acadian neighbors, tilling small amounts of land.[3] The proximity of the bayou insured close communication with other settlers and offered ready access for transportation of goods.

Following the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States, however, the land situation in the Lafourche region changed. As historian J. Carlyle Sitterson wrote in his Sugar Country,

> In the years after the acquisition ..., back lands (beyond the single depth) were offered for sale to the front proprietors at $1.25 per acre. Many planters accordingly enlarged their holdings. These back lands were often valuable, for they were covered with cypress timber, useful for farm buildings, fences, and especially hogshead poles and barrel staves /for sugar packing/.[4]

Sugar planters added to their own holdings, noted Sitterson, by purchasing the neighboring lands of small farmers, and thus it was that Joseph Tucker, a recent settler in the Lafourche area, acquired nearly 5000 arpents of land by 1845. His purchases included the arpents of land along Bayou Lafourche belonging to the Boudreaux estate.[5]

Tucker's land became Laurel Valley Plantation. He re-located the main plantation complex some two miles back from the bayou and constructed a sugar mill as the center of this complex. Thus Laurel Valley was typical of larger sugar plantations of the antebellum era, as described by a visitor in 1853:

> Generally /the various buildings necessary upon every plantation for the manufacture of cane juice into sugar/ are placed midway between the river and the forests in the rear of the plantation. This is done to divide up as much as possible the distance that must be traversed in hauling the wood from the swamps, the cane from the fields, and the crop to the river for shipment.[6]

Beasts of burden were employed in hauling these various items: an inventory of the estate following Tucker's death in 1852 listed 28 mules valued at $2800, 31 mules valued at $3100, two yokes of oxen

at $100, eight carts at $240, and one small cart for $20.[7]

The transportation situation remained much the same at Laurel Valley in the years after the Civil War. Joseph P. Tucker, who took over the plantation in 1869, found however that virtually no animals or equipment remained on the estate. Accordingly he was forced to take out a note for $4200 to acquire 31 mules.[8] Labor too was scarce and agreements were made with farmers to become tenants on the plantation; under the terms of these agreements the farmers were expected to use their own teams of animals in hauling wood and materials to the mill during grinding season.[9]

Burdened by debts, the Tucker family finally relinquished control of Laurel Valley in 1872. After various owners controlled the land for a short period, local resident Burch Wormald acquired the plantation in 1874.[10]

In an effort to resurrect the sugar business at Laurel Valley, Wormald made several improvements to the sugarhouse. At this time began the practice of establishing central factories for small planters in an area to deliver their cane for grinding because many of them could not afford their own mills.[11] Wormald may have effected these changes in the Laurel Valley Sugarhouse to serve the needs of local planters in this way. Lending credence to this assumption is the fact that Laurel Valley apparently purchased in 1877 a "Narrow Gauge Locomotive, No. 286, built . . . by Porter and Bell."[12] Such an acquisition would enable him to deliver cane from these local farmers to his mill.

The history of plantation railroads in the sugar regions of the South is a topic which has thus far received insufficient attention from historians of technology and economics.[13] Such small railroads had originated in Louisiana about 1830, at a time when, as Ulrich Phillips observed, "the whole world had hardly a thousand miles of railroad in operation."[14] And, interestingly enough, credit for the first plantation railroad in the state must be ascribed to a woman. Madam Poefarre, owner of a plantation in St. James Parish, had laid down, on her estate, "a permanent track of iron." "This main road,"said one author, "was fed by moveable rails which brought the cane from each side of the plantation and also hauled wood from the swamp."[15] A car drawn by horse along Madam Poefarre's track hauled 15 to 20 times more cane per day than a single mule wagon operating in the fields.[16] The cost, however, was almost prohibitively expensive for any but the largest planters to erect railroads on their estates; among those who were able to afford the outlay was Valcour Aime, whose railroad served a sugar refinery where many new processes for making sugar first appeared.[17]

The trend towards consolidating estates and establishing central factories after the Civil War gave new life to the railroad business. "Unusually large crop yields" and increased profits also contributed to a "great plantation railroad building spree" during the 1870's.[18] Initially these plantation lines consisted of removable tracks with iron or wooden rails, but "in time fixed railroads were found more successful for carrying cane long distances and carts for short dis-

tances, and portable rails were abandoned."[19] These railroads included standard, narrow (36-inch) and 24-inch gauge models.[20]

An immediate benefit of these short lines was that they tied the plantations to the established railroad companies of the South. As Sitterson noted in Sugar Country, during the last decade of the 19th century the Mississippi Valley Railway Company and the Texas and Pacific Railroad installed switches along their lines "for the movement of cane from field to factory."[21] By the mid-1920's other roads which provided for plantation spurs to deliver and receive freight included the Southern Pacific, Gulf Coast Lines, Franklin and Abbeville Railway, and the Louisiana Railway and Navigation Company.[22]

On plantation cane fields themselves, various forms of labor-saving machinery appeared to ease the task of loading and unloading cane wagons and cars. "Cane slings, derrick, and car loaders were all devised for the economical loading and unloading of cane," wrote one historian.[23] As a result, an observer of Louisiana sugar factories in the early 1900's could report that

> The cost of transport from field to mill is very heavy and tends to limit the size of the sugar factories. As a rule, from the very moment that the canes are cut and laid along the cane rows, they are dealt with mechanically right up to the mill. The canes are collected and loaded into carts in the field by special cane loaders transferred from the carts to the tramway wagons at central loading stations, and removed from the wagons by automatic loaders direct on to cane carrier feeders.[24]

If Laurel Valley did not become fully automated under the ownership of Burch Wormald from 1874 to 1892, it did not have long to wait. The following year the plantation was purchased by J. Wilson Lepine

and Frank Barker. The Barker- Lepine partnership extended back to 1885 when the pair purchased Melodia Plantation in Lafourche Parish, near Laurel Valley. Lepine, a prominent member of the business and social communities in Thibodaux, resided at Melodia and oversaw all aspects of its operations. Barker, in addition to his land holdings, operated a freight barge line on Bayou Lafourche and conducted a commission and brokerage business in New Orleans.[25] Both shared an interest in modernizing the newly-acquired Laurel Valley as soon as possible. Lepine moved to the plantation in 1893 and announced plans to expand the railroad. A local newspaper, noting the plans, wrote:

> Laurel Valley Plantation will be much ameliorated by its present owners. Their first move, which will greatly benefit a large number of people of the vicinity, is the building of a narrow gauge railroad between Laurel Valley and Mr. Barker's "Melodia" plantation, which railroad will embrace a distance of about 4 miles, and be of incalculable benefit to the people along the line, as they can raise cane and send it by said road to Laurel Valley to be manufactured into sugar.[26]

The partnership had secured its first right-of-way agreement for the line by the end of 1893.[27]

While negotiations progressed for these agreements, Lepine made various improvements to the existing road. A map of Laurel Valley from about 1895 showed the route of the road of running from a loading platform on the western side of the Sugarhouse in a straight line past the workers' quarters, bending to the southeast towards the main residence, and then heading due south along the paved road of the plantation to a warehouse at Bayou Lafourche.[28] Lepine erected

at this warehouse an American Hoist and Derrick Company derrick to unload cane shipped to Laurel Valley by barge from small planters.[29] Barges used in hauling cane in Louisiana generally measured 30 feet in length, 8 feet in width, and 3 feet in depth. They could be loaded with two or three tons of cane and could be linked together to form trains of barges.[30]

Lepine also purchased rolling stock. To supplant the existing locomotive (referred to by him as "Our venerable old Dummy," "dummy" being the term for plantation locomotives), Lepine purchased in 1897 a narrow-gauge (36 inch) locomotive from the H.K. Porter Company in Pittsburgh. Locomotive #1790, or "Melodia B," came equipped with 9 x 14 inch cylinders, six 28-inch driving wheels, and fuel oil burners.[31] He also acquired freight cars, so that by 1900 he had two locomtives and 160 cars.[32] These freight cars proved to be very adaptable items. Designed simply as "plain flat cars with sides formed of removeable standards,"[33] the cars served as flat cars, "carboxes" with their ends and sides fitted on, or as tank cars with the addition of portable tanks.[34]

Nearby planters continued to make agreements to supply cane to Laurel Valley, to be shipped to the mill by rail or barge. A typical contract, signed in 1896 by 13 planters, entitled Laurel Valley to "all the cane they may raise on their said lands at the current market rates or at such prices as may be agreed upon between them."[35] Legal snares continued to block the proposed Melodia line, however, and in the interim Lepine received Melodia's cane via barge.[36] Although

Melodia had its own sugarhouse, Lepine apparently wished to consoildate the Laurel Valley operations as much as possible.

To resolve the disputed route, Lepine hit upon a new solution. He wrote Barker in New Orleans in March 1900 that

> I am considering a new route, by going around through the swamp and reaching Melodia from behind. Such a line would be of advantage insofar, as to give us Melodia and surrounding cane, as well as to save us about $6000 annually in Carload rates alone.[37]

Apparently right-of-way was much easier to secure through a swamp than through neighboring cane fields, for Lepine began laying track by the end of April. Construction proceeded using pile-drivers and cypress trees from the swamps for ties and trestles. On July 20 a pleased Lepine wrote Barker that

> I reached Melodia Field yesterday morning, put the first tie down at 7:40 am, laid the first Rail at 9:40 am and went into Melodia Field with the Dummy at eleven o'clock.

"I am about to go over our swamp track with the big locomotive to test its strength," he told Barker on 14 September, and on October 20 he declared that "the railroad through the Swamp is alright."

By 1901 Laurel Valley Railroad measured thirteen miles in length. The precise outlay of this track is difficult to reconstruct because all traces of the track have vanished. It is reasonable to assume that the length of the track from the bayou to the Sugarhouse remained as it was in 1895. USGS maps of the area from 1959 indicate that the track had a branch running north and east of the plantation complex, turning east towards Melodia at the northern terminus of the planta-

tion. As new land was added to the plantation, Lepine extended the track (additions were made of one mile in both 1905 and 1910, and of two miles in 1906), and removed track from lands no longer in use. The track length was given as 12 miles by 1919;[38] in 1925, the year prior to the cessation of operations at Laurel Valley, the track length measured 15 miles.[39]

Prior to the introduction of mechanization at Laurel Valley, loading and unloading of harvested sugar cane was performed by workers. In the fields some workers cut the cane and stripped away the excess leaves from the stalks, while other workers gathered the cane into bundles and heaped it into mule wagons for the trip to the mill. In much the same manner, workers at the mill unloaded the cane from the wagons by hand, tossing the stalks into the mill feeder.

Mechanization and the growing use of plantation railroads wrought changes in the old process. Workers continued to use cane knives to cut down the ripe cane stalks and strip the leaves, and mule-wagons were still used for the initial cane loading (Laurel Valley employing "4 mule wagons weighing 2800 lbs. to haul our cane and we carry 1½ to 2 tons per load," wrote Lepine[40]), but automation took over at this point. Virtually all sugar plantations in Louisiana had employed, by 1900, Castagnos cane cart loaders in their fields. The loader featured an "automatically swinging boom which pivots as the load is hoisted, and is fitted with an automatic grab."[41] An observer of cane proceedures in Louisiana reported that the loaders

were of two types,

> the Mule Power and the Gasoline Power loader.... one mule, as a rule, serves to draw /the former/, and it requires two men and a boy to operate it. It can run freely between the cane rows, so can be worked in any part of the field where the carts are able to go. One loader can deal with 150 tons of cane perday of 12 hours. The motor loader is simply a larger edition of the mule power machine, being fitted with a ... gasoline motor to do the hoisting. It is operated by one man, with the assistance of one or two boys to scrap and one or two to pile. Its capacity is 250 tons of good cane per 12 hours. Loading stations are also erected at suitable spots, where the cane is transferred from cart to rail by means of derricks.[42]

Both types of Castagnos loader were found at Laurel Valley, Lepine writing that the Mule Power could load 150 to 175 tons of cane per day and that the Gasoline Power, using a 4 horsepower Fairbanks engine, could load 225 to 250 tons per day.[43] Loading derricks were used as well, although a description of them is not available. Presumably, in keeping with the other derricks at Laurel Valley, these were American Hoist and Derrick models.

The cane was loaded by the derricks into the rail cars, each of which held 5 tons, for delivery to the mill. Sixty steel cane cars were added to the existing fleet of wooden cars in 1906 and 31 cars followed in 1908. By 1925 Laurel Valley operated some "250 railroad cars, in good shape each car holding about 5½ tons of cane."[44] The cars ran via a switch line from the main track to the cane shed, the line installed in 1904 along with another switch running to the loading dock behind the Sugarhouse.[45]

Various unloading devices handled the cane from the cars. Fore-

most among these was the cane feeder. The cane feeder, wrote one author,

> is a kind of rake /which/ forms one of the best labour-saving devices in the industry. The machine imitates as closely as possible the actions of labourers pulling canes from the cars onto the cane carrier. The feed can be controlled or regulated with greater flexibility than can be obtained with hand labour. The rake, fitted with steel teeth about 17 inches apart, is supported on a pipe frame, and pulled backwards and forwards by a double drum hoisting engine. The stroke can be changed at will, thereby taking as much or as little cane as desired.[46]

The sides of the cane cars (on the newer cars, which unlike their earlier counterparts had permanent rather than removable sides) were hinged and swung down, allowing the cane feeder to rake the cane onto the carrier.[47]

Through its operating period, Laurel Valley used several forms of cane feeders. First among these was the Bodley-Mallon, an early form installed prior to 1900.[48] This was replaced in 1905 by the Williams patent cane feeder, first used at neighboring Acadia Sugar Factory in 1902. This feeder featured a 7 foot by 26 foot wood frame with a 13 foot 10 tooth rake. It was powered by a 10 x 12 vertical center crank slide valve engine, with a 34 inch x 7 inch flywheel.[49] The final version employed was the Walsh patent cane feeder, erected in 1911. Lepine's order for this device requested

> one Walsh Cane Carrier Feeder complete. The rake bar will have to be 13 feet wide with 12 feet of teeth. The carrier is 6'6" and the distance from carrier to side of cane car is 11 feet making 17'6" reach. We would like for rake to pull from two ropes on two drums instead of one rope.[50]

A 6 x 8 double cylinder Jackson Church Company engine with sprocket drive, powered the carrier.[51]

The other unloading device employed in the cane shed area was the American Hoist and Company Derrick, installed in 1909. "Where the climate is cool and the cane deteriorates but little in storage, as in Louisiana," wrote one author,

> derricks are often used. These are usually arranged to lift the cane from the cars or carts and deposit it upon the /carrier/, or in large piles for the night work, or to prevent interruption in the cart or railway service.[52]

A steel derrick, the American Derrick had a full circle swing and a 60 foot boom with over 170 feet of hoisting cable. It was set on a circular brick foundation 8 feet in diameter and 2 feet high. A $5\frac{1}{2}$ x 8 double cylinder hoisting engine powered the derrick.[53]

The derrick remained one of Lepine's prides. He installed it in 1909 for $2500 along with 301 pairs of cane slings. In a letter to the American Hoist and Derrick Company in June 1910, Lepine wrote that "we feed our mill easily with it and we grind an average of 850 tons per day." Still erect although shifted from its original site, the derrick represents the sole reminder of Laurel Valley's railroad.

The opening of the Melodia - Laurel Valley spur in 1900 ended the hauling of cane from Melodia by barge since the cane could now be handled by rail. Writing to planter N.P. Moss of Lafayette in 1901, Lepine described the new operations at Melodia:

> I have used Drackett and Simms Cane-Slings and Dumper for about three seasons in transfering whole loads of Cane /from Melodia/ from Cart to Bayou Barge, and found these quite satisfactory for this purpose. Since I have stopped hauling Cane in Barges, I have changed from Drackett and Simms Slings to Bodley Chain Slings, as I prefer them for transfering Cane to Cars or Carrier, they seem to trip or dump a load more satisfactory.[54]

This Melodia spur also provided Laurel Valley Plantation access to the Southern Pacific Railroad, whose track passed near Melodia Sugar-house. Freight such as animal feed, bricks, lumber, and machinery was generally handled here, and a warehouse and loading platform were erected to transfer goods from the standard gauge SPRR cars to the Laurel Valley narrow gauge cars. Molasses and sugar sacks (the latter consisting of raw sugar rather than granulated) were delivered to Melodia from Laurel Valley for shipment to New Orleans markets.[55] In 1903 Lepine wrote to W.F. Owen, Freightmaster for the SPRR, seeking permission to extend "Melodia Switch" (as the freight station at Melodia was called) 600 or 700 feet to install a new switch because the present switch "just barely permits us to receive and dispatch freight and even for that purpose crowds us considerably during the busy sugar season."[56] The 1903 Diary noted for August 13 that Mr. Lepine was "at Melodia Switch to meet by appointment Mr. Owen and other S.P. officials with whom he made satisfactory arrangements" for the large extension.

Freight continued to be handled at Bayou Lafourche, with barges transfering their cargo to the warehouse and railroad depot on the

bayou bank. The Laurel Valley Diaries and expense books from 1903 to 1915 record barge deliveries of assorted goods and provisions, including coal for the plantation draining machine, bricks, oats, and food products. The Barker Barge Line served Laurel Valley and other estates along Bayou Lafourche with the steamer Climax.[57] Another company, the Williams Barge Company, delivered cooperage supplies to the plantation in 1903. About 1910 Lepine began shipping sugar by barge rather than by rail, telling Joseph Lallande that "it saves me the handling and I only have to haul it two miles and it is cheaper to me."[58]

The majority of the cane purchased by Laurel Valley continued to arrive by rail from small planters living along the track. As of 1900 the firm expected to purchase five thousand tons of cane from planters in the vicinity.[59] The actual amounts were much higher; from a low of 8000 tons in 1899, the amount increased to over 34,300 tons by 1909.[60] A typical list of cane ground, from the 1908 Diary, ranged from 4 tons received from J.O. Poche to 2183 tons received from Alcide Toups. (Toups was apparently not always satisfied with his relationship to the plantation; he addressed a letter to Barker and Lepine in 1919 saying "Your narrow gauge rail road contract expired last year. Kindly remove same at once of my place.") Large amounts of cane were also obtained from nearby Octavia and Webster Plantations, and in 1926 it was noted that these lands had been linked by rail to Laurel Valley.[61] This same report noted that

> all canes are delivered by rail excepting the Barker cane /from Clotilda/ which is delivered by the Barker Barge Line and transferred to railroad cars on the bayou bank at a loading station about 3 miles from refinery. This cane is very expensive cane and should be abandoned unless arrangements could be made to buy same at the cane transfer and at factory weights.[62]

Another precious commodity handled by rail at Laurel Valley was fuel oil, used to power the boilers in the Sugarhouse. Barker and Lepine purchased 20 shares of stock in 1902 from the newly-chartered "People's Fuel Oil Corporation," a concern formed to supply oil to Louisiana sugarhouses.[63] To haul this oil from Melodia, where it was delivered,[64] Lepine purchased steel tank cars with tanks 4 feet in diameter and 23 feet in length, capable of holding 2100 gallons of oil.[65] The tank cars were also used in shipping molasses to the SPRR at Melodia. Lepine also contracted with the Thibodaux Boiler Works to produce two oil storage tanks measuring 45 feet in diameter and 25 feet IN LENGTH[66] Companies including Texaco and Beaumont Fuel Oil supplied some 10,000 bbls oil annually to meet the needs of the Sugarhouse grinding season.

In 1900, it will be recalled, Laurel Valley employed two locomotives for hauling -- the 1877 "Dummy" and the 1897 Melodia B. During operations with the Dummy in 1901 an eccentric strap broke and although it was repaired, Lepine wrote Barker that "I am very much afraid that she will soon resign on account of old age and other infirmities."[67] The incident, plus the new fuel oil contract, prompted Lepine to order a new "plantation locomotive" from the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia in 1902. Locomotive A4436 or "Maud L"

(named for one of Lepine's children), came equipped with 9 x 14 cylinders, four 30 inch driving wheels, fuel oil burners, and headlights (since cane hauling operated on a 24 hour basis during grinding).[68] By this time Lepine had also acquired a track velocipede from the Sheffield division of Fairbanks, Morse and Company, used for track inspections, and a hand car to transport 20 workers back and forth between Laurel Valley and Melodia.[69]

The locomotives and hand car were housed when not in use in a single story frame building made of pine lumber, measuring 12 x 50 feet. A spur rail passing in front of the Sugarhouse linked this building with the main line. A 1922 building inventory of the plantation listed the value of the locomotive house at $100.[70]

Maintaining the railroad track was a full-time and year-round operation at Laurel Valley. The 1903 Diary listed the railroad payroll for that year as follows:

Febry 7	taking up track on upper line	$14.00	
" 20	track repairs at Melodia	3.10	
Mch 7	laying a new switch-track to Mel. Sugarhouse and Repairs	18.55	+ 35.65
June 6	Track Repairs	7.25	
July 18	" "	1.10	
Aug15	" " and making frogs	22.85	
" 29	" " " " "	70.70	
" "	" " clearing Track	86.75	
" "	" " " " " Melodia	86.30	
Sept 12	" " and making frogs	124.60	
" "	" Pile-driving at Melodia	30.65	
" "	" cleaning track	45.00	
" 26	" Repairs section gang	81.10	
" "	" " Pile-driving	34.70	
Oct 10	" " "	74.00	
" 24	" " "	54.40	
" "	" Cleaning L.V. andMelodia	102.75	
		$857.80	

Cleaning the track was especially important since the warm tropical climate caused the track to become overgrown with weeds during the summer months. To solve this problem Lepine purchased a weed burner which work-gangs ran up and down the track in August and September. Another important task was trestle construction and pile-driving in the swamps. The 1903 Diary recorded on 9 September, for instance, that

> Mr. Lepine ... went in the swamps in the afternoon with Pile-Driver to load Pilings and drive some of it. Met with much difficulties and delay owing to bad wheels on Pile-Driver Car.

Two days later Lepine went out again, this time to Melodia, "driving 30 piling, slow work and much delay on acc. of wet weather." Piles and wood for ties was easily obtainable from the swamps behind the plantation, and teams of oxen were employed in hauling out the wood.[71] In 1926 a plantation inspector reported that "the writer was insured that enough timber remains in the swamps owned by the Company to insure all cross ties needed for operation of railroad for years to come."[72] He also noted that the track had been completely overhauled two years previously at a cost of $18,000.

Despite all the concerns for track repairs, accidents were not uncommon along the Laurel Valley Railroad. In 1904, according to that year's Diary, there was a serious accident involving a trestle in July. Another accident occurred in 1903 with a trestle on October 20, as reported in the Diary:

> Hoe gang again went to Melodia and cleaned R.R.

> track and on their return came a very bad Cropper on the Trestle-line, by the running off the track of their Hand-car. Alidore Bourgeois suffered a fractured Jaw and several severeand painful bruises...Several others were slightly hurt. Dr. Smith accompanied by Dr. Tralan patched up the unlucky ones.

A few months earlier, on July 28 a wreck had occurred "owing to carelessness and ignorance" and three oil-cars were derailed, breaking one worker's jaw. Despite these accidents no one was killed at Laurel Valley due to railroad operations.

The 1920's brought hard times to Laurel Valley and to other sugar plantations due to the cane mosaic virus. The last plantation railroad to be built in Louisiana had been completed in 1920, and the plagued sugar crop "along with the rapid increase of improved roads, created conditions which doomed the plantation railroad."[73] Mr. Lepine's death in 1926 hastened the end of the line for the Laurel Valley Railroad. His son hoped to resurrect the mill operations two years after his father's death and the closing of the factory, and he wrote that Laurel Valley contained "25 miles of railroad, two locomotives, 250 cane cars, all in fairly good shape, for I am this year going to use railroad, locomotives and cars."[74] The onset of the Great Depression shattered his hopes, however, and the Sugarhouse never re-opened. Track was torn up at Laurel Valley, trestles dismantled, and the locomotives sold. 'Maud L" was not sold until the 1950's and was purchased by Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio, where it is still in use. At the plantation, however, the "good sight" of Lepine's railroad has vanished, leaving

behind only memories of an exciting era in Laurel Valley's history.

Notes

[1] J. Wilson Lepine to Frank Barker, New Orleans, 20 October 1900.

[2] J. Carlyle Sitterson, Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753 - 1950 (University of Kentucky Press, 1953), p. 47.

[3] Paul Leslie, "Laurel Valley Sugar Plantation" (Thibodaux: Historic American Engineering Record, 1978), p. 6.

[4] Sitterson, pp. 47 - 48.

[5] Leslie, pp. 7 -8.

[6] T.B. Thorpe, "Sugar and the Sugar Regions of Louisiana," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 7 (June - November 1853), p. 758.

[7] Inventory of the Estate of Joseph W. Tucker, in Lafourche Parish Clerk of Courts, "Joseph W. Tucker Succession Papers," No. 230 Probates (Thibodaux, Louisiana). Hereafter cited as "Tucker Papers."

[8] Petition of Louis S. Bush in Tucker Papers.

[9] Tenant lease agreement, c. 1868, in Tucker Papers.

[10] Leslie, p. 15.

[11] Sitterson, pp. 257 - 258.

[12] Lepine to H.K. Porter Company, Pittsburgh, 13 June 1901.

[13] The major sources for information on plantation railroads are Sitterson in Sugar Country (pp. 134 - 135, 264) and Louis Saillard, "Last of the Cane Haulers," Rail Classics 3:2 (May 1974), pp. 18 - 25. Saillard's article deals primarily with the railroad at Lula Plantation, which ended service in 1972.

[14] Ulrich B. Phillips, Life & Labor in the Old South (1929; reprint Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 126.

[15] Sitterson, p. 135.

[16] Saillard, p. 19.

[17] Phillips, p. 126. Aime's railroad was erected in 1833.

[18] Saillard, p. 19. This building spree lasted until 1920. "The boom was over by 1910," wrote Saillard, "but by the time the last new narrow gauge plantation steamer was delivered in 1920, no less than 120 sugar companies had built well over 500 miles of trackage."

[19] Sitterson, p. 264.

[20] Saillard, p. 20.

[21] Sitterson, pp. 264 - 265.

[22] A. B. Gilmore, Gilmore's Directory of Louisiana Sugar Planters, 19th edition (New Orleans, 1926), p. 46.

[23] Sitterson, p. 277.

[24] J.F. Clarenc, "The Mechanical Side of Sugar Manufacture in Louisiana," International Sugar Journal 17 (1915), p. 424.

[25] "Laurel Valley Plantation," Southern Manufacturer 7:7 (November 1901, "Lafourche Parish Edition"), p. 53.

[26] Lafourche Comet, 2 February 1893.

[27] John H, Stubbs, Architectural History of Laurel Valley Plantation, Volume II (Thibodaux: American Revolution Bicentennial Committee, 1975), p. 9.

[28] A.B.Benson and A.C. Bell, "Topographical Map of Laurel Valley Plantation Parish Lafourche," (New Orleans, c. 1895).

[29] "Laurel Valley Plantation," p. 53. A steel crane derrick, also manufactured by the American Hoist and Derrick Company, was put up to replace the earlier derrick. A small building was also erected to house the derrick runners. (Laurel Valley Diary 1915, 30 August, 18 September.)

[30] Noel Deerr, Cane Sugar (New York: D.Van Nostrand Company, 1911), pp. 161 - 162.

[31] Barker and Lepine to H.K. Porter Company, 10 April 1902; H.K. Porter Company to Barker and Lepine, 15 April 1902; American Appraisal Company, Appraisal of the Barker and Lepine Lafourche Crossing (Milwaukee, 1909).

[32] "Laurel Valley Plantation," p. 53.

[33] Deerr, pp. 159 - 160.

[34] Laurel Valley Diaries, 10 October 1908, 19 January 1912.

[35] Quoted in Stubbs, p. 9.

[36] Lepine to Harry Bush, Montegut, Louisiana, 17 April 1902.

[37] Lepine to Barker, 20 March 1900.

[38] Stubbs, p. 20.

[39] Gilmore, p. 85.

[40] Barker and Lepine to the Thomas B. Jeffry Company, Kenosha, Wisconsin, 25 September 1916. Lepine wrote the letter to this company to recommend their using Quad trucks for hauling cane, noting that "We do not know of any one hauling cane with trucks in Louisiana but no doubt it can be done." Tractors had begun to appear in Louisiana about this time, with about 150 in use by 1919. (Sitterson, p. 348.)

[41] Clarenc, p. 424.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Lepine to Joseph Reed, 25 August 1910.

[44] [?] to Morris LeCompte, New Orleans, 28 February 1926.

[45] Laurel Valley Diary 1904, 31 May. The 1909 Diary recorded for 1 June that workers "made track going under shed straight so as to run in motor car easier." In 1915, according to the Diary entry for 12 October, workers connected a switch to the main line running under the cane shed to the mill room.

[46] Clarenc, p. 454.

[47] Deerr, pp. 159 - 160.

[48] "Laurel Valley Plantation," p. 53. James Mallon invented several labor-saving devices for handling cane in the 1880's and 1890's, including "rope slings for moving cane from the field to the cars and from cars to the mill" in 1882, and a cane derrick and cane feeder in the early 1890's. (Sitterson, p. 275.)

[49] American Appraisal inventory.

50 Barker and Lepine to Henry Nedler, Plaquemine, Louisiana, 28 April 1911.

51 George U. Borde, Invetory Laurel Valley Sugar House near Lafourche Crossing, Loùisiana (New Orleans, 1919).

52 Guilford L. Spencer, A Handbook for Sugar Cane Manufacturers and Their Chemists, 2nd edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1917), p. 9.

53 Borde inventory.

54 Lepine to Moss, 22 April 1901.

55 Laurel Valley Diary 1903, 9 December.

56 Lepine to Owen, 9 April 1903. Owen's reply (6 July) called the proposed extension "far from satisfactory." He suggested that Lepine consider extending the track 700 feet towards Bayou Lafourche as a "double-ender." Lepine replied (8 July) that he would accept this compromise, "providing same does not extend west of our own Melodia wagon-road, as it would seriously inconvenience me."

57 Laurel Valley Diary, 2 March, 3 August. By 1926 the steamer Lafourche was making this run. (Gilmore, p. 48.) The Tucker Succession Papers contain a list of "Expenses of plantation of Est. J. W. Tucker, 1852" which noted shipments by steamers Music, Mary Toby, and Terrebonne.

58 Lepine to Joseph Lallande, 17 June 1910.

59 "Laurel Valley Plantation," p. 53.

60 This material is based upon a tabulation of the Laurel Valley Plantation production charts for the years 1895 - 1925 (1896 - 1898, 1926 missing) prepared in 1978 by Dr. Paul Leslie. I thank Dr. Leslie for furnishing me with this information.

61 [?] to LeCompte, 28 February 1926.

62 Ibid.

63 Franklin (Louisiana) Vindicator-News, 2 May 1902.

64 Lepine wrote to Owens 9 April 1902, stating that "in order to receive and handle oil as easily as possible, would like to have you raise the track of Melodia Switch to a level with your main

track. This would enable us to discharge Tank-Cars by gravity almost as fast as we receive them." A work force of Southern Pacific men carried out this work (and the Melodia Switch extension) in 1903. (1903 Diary, 21 - 24 Ocotber.)

65 Lepine to William B. Pierce, Ltd., New Orleans, 23 March 1902. The cars were acquired secondhand. (Lepine to Louis Kaufmann, New Orleans, 12 April 1902.)

66 O. Naquin, Thibodaux Boiler Works, to Barker and Lepine, 4 February 1903.

67 Lepine to Barker, 15 August 1901. This locomotive was sold in 1903 to Greenwood Plantation. (1903 Diary, 7 October.)

68 "General Specifications of a Locomotive for Messrs. Barker & Lepine," Baldwin Locomotive Works to Barker and Lepine, 6 May 1902; American Appraisal inventory.

69 Handwritten inventory of goods purchased, contained in back of 1908 Logbook; Lepine to Louis Kaufmann,New Orleans, 13 August 1908. Lepine wrote to Kaufmann to purchase a hand car to replace one that he had bought in 1900.

70 "Laurel Valley Plant," building inventory dated 30 September 1922, contained in back pages of 1922 Logbook.

71 Laurel Valley Diary 1912, 25 March.

72 [?] to LeCompte, 28 February 1926.

73 Saillard, p. 21.

74 Letter of J. Wilson Lepine, jr., 1928, quoted in part in the National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form for Laurel Valley Plantation, prepared by Anne Harmon, Dr. Paul Leslie, et. al., 1977, item 8, p. 3.

Sources

I. Manuscript Collections:

Nicholls State University Archives, Thibodaux, Louisiana
Barker-Lepine and Laurel Valley Collection, including:
Laurel Valley Diaries, 1903 - 1916
Laurel Valley Letterbooks, Nov. 1899 - Sept. 1909
Barker and Lepine and Lepine personal correspondences, Oct. 1909 - Dec. 1926
Laurel Valley Logbooks, 1908, 1922
American Appraisal Company, Appraisal of the Barker and Lepine Lafourche Crossing, Louisiana (Milwaukee, 1909; appraisal book, plan showing Locomotive House and track near cane shed)
Photographs of railroad
Miscellaneous papers, including trade catalogues and machinery specifications

II. Legal Documents:

Lafourche Parish Courthouse, Thibodaux
Clerk of Courts, "Joseph W. Tucker Succesion Papers," No. 230 Probates

III. Materials in the possession of private individuals:

Mrs. J. Wilson Lepine, Jr., Thibodaux
Benson & Bell, "Topographical Map of Laurel Valley Plantation Parish Lafourche" (New Orleans, c. 1895)

IV. Monographs and Descriptions of Laurel Valley:

[?] to Morris LeCompte, 28 February 1926 (6-page typescript description of plantation conditions; copy in Barker-Lepine and Laurel Valley Collection, Nicholls State University Library Archives)

Gilmore, A.B., Gilmore's Directoryof Louisiana Sugar Planters, 19th edition (New Orleans, 1926; see entry for Laurel Valley Plantation, p. 85)

"Laurel Valley Plantation," Southern Manufacturer 7:7 (November 1901, "Lafourche Parish Edition"), pp. 52-53.

Leslie, Paul, "Laurel Valley Sugar Plantation" (Thibodaux: Historic American Engineering Record, 1978).

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Stubbs, John H., Architectural History of Laurel Valley Plantation, Volume II (Thibodaux: American Revolution Bicentennial Committee, 1975).

V. Newspapers:

Franklin (Louisiana) Vindicator-News

Lafourche (Parish) Comet

VI. Books:

Deerr, Noel, Cane Sugar (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1911).

Phillips, Ulrich B., Life and Labor in the Old South (1929; reprint Little, Brown and Company, 1967).

Sitterson, J. Carlyle, Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753 - 1950 (University of Kentucky Press, 1953).

Spencer, Guilford L., A Handbook forCane Sugar Manufacturers and their Chemists, 2nd edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1917).

VII. Articles:

Clarenc, J. F., "The Mechanical Side of Sugar Manufacture in Louisiana," International Sugar Journal 17 (1915), pp. 424 - 427.

Saillard, Louis, "Last of the Cane Haulers," Rail Classics 3:2 (May 1974), pp. 18 - 26.

Thorpe, T.B., "Sugar and the Sugar Regions of Louisiana," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 7 (June - November 1853), pp. 746 - 767.

Addendum To:
LAUREL VALLEY SUGAR PLANTATION:
RAILROAD (MELODIA SWITCH)
2 miles south of Thidaux on
State Route 308
Thibodaux
Lafourche Parish
Louisiana

HAER NO. LA-1B

HAER
LA,
24-THIB,
1B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127